



SUCCESS STORY

Football League Restores Amputee Dignity in Liberia

Football provides a positive outlet for Monrovia's marginalized amputee community



Amputee football teams in action at Fish Market Field, Monrovia.

USAID/OTI's BRDG-Liberia program was initiated in September 2006 to support the political transition prompted by the free and fair election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected female head of state in Africa.

The Building Recovery and Reform through Democratic Governance (BRDG) program assists the Government of Liberia and other key actors to further the following political objectives:

- *Improving capacity in such areas as planning, budgeting, communication, and coordination with relevant counterparts*
- *Mounting effective responses to high-visibility issues*
- *Strengthening the Mano River Union by supporting cooperative regional activities*

The USAID Mission in Liberia, USAID's Africa Bureau, and the Office of Democracy and Governance are key players in the coordination of the BRDG program.

May 2007 – Fourteen years of civil strife have left Liberia and its people divided and traumatized. The casualties of the conflict include many amputees who have been excluded from employment and leadership opportunities. Limited options have left amputees begging for handouts on street corners and in grocery store parking lots.

Many of Liberia's amputees are former youth combatants who had limbs amputated because of injuries sustained during the war. In addition, many civilians also experienced war-related injuries that resulted in amputation. Unfortunately, many amputees lack a meaningful role in Liberian society, thus exacerbating their trauma and leading to further isolation. The marginalization of the amputee community continues to create barriers not only to the individual amputee's reintegration into society but also to the national reconciliation and social-healing process that is crucial to Liberia's post-transition democracy. Fortunately, the marginalization of amputees is a high-visibility political issue that OTI's BRDG-Liberia program is well-placed to address.

Capitalizing on the success of the Liberian National Amputee Football Team, which captured the second-place trophy at the international tournament in Sierra Leone in February 2007, OTI partnered with the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Recovery to organize an amputee football (soccer) league in Monrovia. The award-winning team mobilized amputees by conducting outreach via peer contact and radio programs and succeeded in organizing six teams in the neighborhoods of greater Monrovia. Each team consists of 25 players and has received coaching, uniforms, and training supplies. The effort has reached 75 percent of Monrovia's amputees and, in turn, has facilitated the amputees' psycho-social readjustment and helped to restore their dignity. In addition, Liberia's amputee football league has recently been recognized at the international level. The league responded to an invitation to field a team in a tournament for club teams in Russia and was subsequently awarded the trophy for the most disciplined team.

